DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 846 CS 212 542

AUTHOR Bannister, Linda
TITLE Women's Rhetoric as Literature.
PUB DATE Oct 90
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association (Salt Lake City, UT, October 11-13, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Feminism; Higher Education; *Rhetorical Criticism; *Sex Bias; *Sex Differences; Theory Practice Relationship; *Womens Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Feminist Criticism; *Feminist Scholarship

ABSTRACT

If feminist values are to penetrate and undermine the masculine systems which contain them, it is essential to believe that any serious writing that women do is literature. Only in the last few years has scholarship in women's studies begun to address women in the history of rhetoric. The contemporary woman rhetorician faces the tendency of the established academic community to reject her work because of its association with practice, rather than theory. What she produces is more pedagogical than theoretical, suitable for teaching, but hardly the basis for "understanding" human discourse. Feminist rhetoricians such as Mina Shaughnessy, Andrea Lunsford, and Janet Emig, who are loud voices in the field of composition, have been silenced in rhetoric. Part of the unwillingness of the rhetoric establishment to accept feminist theory stems from the sexes' different conceptions of self. As Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan have demonstrated, girls' early identification processes with their mothers tend to be relational, while boys in general reject relationship in favor of hierarchical thinking. The feminist rhetoricians identify a different voice, one which allows the collaboration of the multi-vocal text. Women "do" rhetoric differently, and are reinventing the rhetorical tradition. Because of women's contributions, rhetoric will be judged in part on the basis of relationship, growth, community, and learning. (Twenty-one references are attached.) (SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linda Bannister

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED325846

Linda Bannister
Loyola Marymount University
Department of English
Los Angeles, CA 90045
RMMLA 1990, SLC

CS212542

Women's Rhetoric as Literature

Some of you may be curious about my title. Let me tell you what I'm not going to do. I'm not going to analyze any hot feminist oratory. Nor am I going to insist that women tell lies and try to pass it off as great writing. But what I do believe, and what is essential for us all to believe, if feminine values are to penetrate and undermine the masculine systems which contain them, is that any serious writing that women do _is_ literature.

Most of us are familiar with Geoffrey Hartman's argument that literary studies should blur genres and that to restrict the term literature to classic works of fiction, poetry and drama is to err. What my title really suggests is that women who've theorized about discourse in writing are creating a body of literature, and that this literature is important _as_ theory, _as_ criticism, _as_ pedagogy and _as_ the elegant dance of language, sound and experience.

In the 1970s, feminist critics focused on the idea that

women writers had been silenced, excluded from literary history. Critics like Tillie Olsen and Ellen Moers demanded status and recognition for women writers, sought to rediscover the lost work of women writers, and wished to manifest "what it is to be female" (Feminist Literary Theory, 1). It wasn't enough to fit women into a male-dominated tradition; they also wanted to write the history of a literary tradition among women.

Similarly, according to received tradition, no woman has been a force in the history of rhetoric. In the many histories of rhetoric, from the classical period up through the present, not one female rhetorician is mentioned.

Scholarship in women's studies has begun to mention influential women writers and speakers of every historical period, women whose works have been distorted, trivialized or simply omitted. This growing body of work on the history of women had not, until the last few years, addressed women in the history of rhetoric. Now revisionist historians are finally writing about women in rhetoric. Jan Swearington (UT-Arlington) has researched the female sophists, Marilyn Atlas (Purdue) is working on 19th century women rhetors, and Cheryl Glenn (Oregon State U) has written a dissertation called Muted Voices: Women in the History of Rhetoric from Antiquity through the Renaissance. These researchers seek to establish a tradition among women rhetoricians, as have their counterparts in literary studies.

This task is not an easy one. In 1942, Virginia Woolf wrote of the "Angel in the House" ("Professions for Women"), whose shadow falls on the pages of every woman writer. Woolf heard the angel say: "My dear you are a young woman . . . Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure." Woolf says she took the angel by the throat and did her best to kill her, but the Angel died hard; she was always creeping back, urging charm, conciliation and lies.

In 1942, Woolf said killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer. In 1990, killing the Angel is still part of our occupation. And not just the occupation of imaginative writers. Those who would write revisionist histories and criticism of literature and rhetoric face rejection by the established community, not necessarily on the merits of the study, but because they are produced by a "fringe" element, a feminine element. Michele Barrett warns of another danger in creating a female tradition: The continued use of compromised aesthetic concepts that are linked with the social order the new criticism/histories wish to undermine (Feminist Literary Theory, 3).

These obstacles are also faced by the contemporary woman rhetorician. She is often not a respected contributor to the field, in part because much of her work is a conflation of

theory and practice. Most twentieth-century women rhetoricians' scholarship and research is far from pure. Defiled by the classroom, by her interaction with students, her theory is intimately involved in practice. And that costs her. It is more likely she'll be called a compositionist, not a true rhetorician. What she produces is more pedagogical than theoretical, suitable for teaching in EN 110, but hardly the basis for understanding human discourse.

Contemporary women rhetoricians also must decide whether or not they wish their work to be considered part of the male tradition. Practical matters like publication, book sales and participation in anthologies seem to dictate assimilation; and women rhetoricians have perhaps not evolved at the same rate as our colleagues in fiction and poetry. We are still looking for acceptance on masculine territory. But a close look at the theory women rhetoricians produce suggests a significant departure from the androcentric tradition in rhetoric.

Many women rhetoricians struggle to think and write like women in a man's world. There are three who are excellent examples of women who are loud voices in composition who have been silenced in rhetoric.

Mina Shaughnessy. Andrea Lunsford. Janet Emig.

In order to hear these women properly, it is important to put their work in the context of feminist inquiry. Nancy

Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering and Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice provide us with a by now familiar framework for understanding these uniquely feminine voices.

Chodorow and Gilligan agree that men and women have different conceptions of self and different modes of interaction with others as a result of their different experiences--especially their early relationships with their primary parents, their mothers.

Chodorow says girls and boys develop different relational capacities as a result of growing up in a family in which women mother. A girl's gender role identification processes "are more continuously embedded in and mediated by her ongoing relationship with her mother" (176). The boy, on the other hand, gives up, in addition to his attachment to his mother, his primary identification with her. Feminine identification processes are relational, whereas masculine identification processes deny relationship.

Gilligan differentiates men's and women's thinking about moral issues with two metaphors: the web and the ladder. Women define morality in terms of conflicting responsibilities rather than competing rights; men equate morality and fairness, and link moral development to the understanding of rights and rules. Women operate in a web, suggesting interconnectedness and relationship building; men operate on a ladder, suggesting achievement

orientation and hierarchical thinking.

Unquestionably, it isn't easy to substitute relational thinking for hierarchical thinking, to embrace inclusivity when exclusivity has been the norm for centuries. As Adrienne Rich says so eloquently:

> It is not easy to think like a woman in a man's world . . . To think like a woman in a man's world means thinking critically, refusing to accept the givens, making connections between facts and ideas which men have left unconnected . . . It means constant critique of language, for as Wittgenstein (no feminist) observed, "the limits of my language are the limits of my world" ("Taking Women Students Seriously").

Revisionist rhetoric draws on the relational, integrated ways of knowing that research has identified as particularly female. In a fascinating article called "Composing as a Woman," Elizabeth Flynn draws a dramatic conclusion:

> The field of composition studies could be described as a feminization of our previous conceptions of how writers write and how writing should be taught. Rather than enshrining the text in its final form, composition specialists demonstrate that the works produced by established authors are often the result of an extended, frequently enormously frustrating process . . . . In a sense, composition specialists replace the figure of the authoritative father with an image of a nurturing mother . . . . We are dealing with a field that, from the beginning, has welcomed contributions from women--indeed, has been shaped by women (CCC, 423).

Shaughnessy, Lunsford and Emig are certainly "foremothers"

in Composition. It is my contention that they are rhetoricians as well, and what's more, their rhetoric is feminine: relational, collaborative, integrated--involved in ongoing process and growth, rather than hierarchy and authoritative achievement.

Shaughnessy's inquiry resulted when her university, CUNY, experienced the cataclysmic shift to open admissions. The now classic Errors and Expectations is where Shaughnessy systematically discovers the "whys" for her basic writers' difficulties.

In her body of work, Shaughnessy urges teachers to "dive in," to "remediate themselves" by careful observation of themselves as writers (CCC, 1976), as well as their students. She urges them to become students in community with their own students, to believe in their students' educability and to view their discourse as neither random or illogical, but ingeniously adaptive. Shaughnessy is the quintessential practitioner/ inquirer--dedicated, altruistic, intolerant of inequalities in education, determined to strengthen the marginalized, to help them learn.

The goal of Shaughnessy's rhetoric echoes the philosophy of Paulo Freire in his landmark book Pedagogy of the Oppressed: "To give voice to those with inexpressible pain," to empower by knowledge. Perhaps more than any other in our profession, Mina Shaughnessy has raised our collective consciousness about the

rights and abilities of basic writers. She did this by transforming her practice into inquiry, when "standard procedures" no longer worked. Her goal is the growth and learning of the community of basic writers, through relational, collaborative rhetoric. Her practice led her to the theory that teachers and students learn most as equal participants in a dialogic process.

Andrea Lunsford is the co-author of a new rhetoric that rejects what Toril Moi has called "the model of the author as God the Father of the Text" (Lunsford and Ede, MLA 1988) for a dialogic *or* polyphonal model of communication. Working with her long-time friend and collaborator Lisa Ede, Lunsford has just published Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing, which challenges the assumption that writing is a solitary act. Lunsford and Ede trace the history of writing to show how the myth of the solitary writer has informed the Western philosophical tradition and how contemporary composing practice challenges this tradition. Their study of 1400 professionals shows how collaborative writing has recently flourished across disciplines. They identify two modes of collaborative writing and describe them from a feminist viewpoint. In the hierarchical mode, collaboration, goals, and authority are "carefully, and often rigidly, structured," and the "lowest-paid, least-recognized members of research teams perform

most of the work," yet many get no credit or reward (Preface). In the dialogic mode, which Lunsford thinks of as feminine, the collaborative roles are "loosely structured" and "fluid," and the process of articulating goals is as important as the goals themselves--and sometimes even more important.

Primarily through the work of women, Lunsford and Ede have found much evidence of this dialogic mode of collaboration, one that allows an contextualized, multi-vocal text to appear. This mode, this "new key," is not one which they alone have struck. Gilbert and Gubar; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule have struck it. It is a key, Lunsford and Ede argue, that has been struck clearly and repeatedly by many women and a few men, but which has often not been heard--by our professional organizations, our institutions, by the culture within which we are all so deeply inscribed. Their challenge, they say, is not to strike a new key, but to hear within that key the full texture of layered, polyphonic chords--and to create professional spaces within which those chords may be played and echoed. In their rhetoric, Lunsford and Ede call for collaboration, for a nurturing of process and relationship. But for them, and many other women, collaboration is more than just a good way to get work done; it's vital to education and even the survival of the planet.

Janet Emig's case study, The Composing Processes of Twelfth

Graders, revolutionized composition theory and practice. Emig demonstrates writing as a mode of learning (CCC 77). She argues, "Writing, through its inherent reinforcing cycle involving hand, eye, and brain marks a uniquely more powerful multi-representational mode for learning" (124-25). With this claim, Emig spearheaded a crucial line of inquiry that has profoundly affected composition studies. In fact, the phenomenon of Writing Across the Curriculum has its roots in a writing-as-learning philosophy. In 1980, Emig characterized composition as at a pre-paradigmatic stage, a stage of revolutionary scientific activity. She demonstrates that our intellectual history is a tacit tradition, founded on multi-disciplinary approaches, because "powerful and beautiful explanations for how and why persons write reside in many disciplines" ("Tacit Tradition" 155). Emig creates a credo of the writing community:

> We believe:
> that almost all persons can write and want to write;
> that not writing or not wanting to write is unnatural;
> that, if either occurs, something major has been subverted in a mind, a life;
> that as teachers and researchers we must try to help make writing natural again, and necessary.
> Credo, credemus. And so may we continue together.

Her philosophy of writing is unabashedly human-centered, her rhetoric founded on collaboration and community. It's not surprising that Emig titled a collection of her essays The Web of

Meaning. Her thinking, her rhetoric is web-like, interconnected, feminine.

It is impossible to draw firm conclusions from such a brief look at these women. Still, there is enough here to suggest that women do rhetoric differently, that the rhetorical tradition is being reinvented by them, and with their help effective language will no longer be judged solely on the basis of achievement, authoritative weight, and victory. Because of their contributions, rhetoric will also be judged on the basis of relationship, growth, community and learning. And we, symbol-using, meaning-making creatures, will profit from this feminine rhetoric.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ashton-Jones, Evelyn and DeneKay Thomas. "Composition, Collaboration, and Women's Ways of Knowing. A Conversation with Mary Belenky." Journal of Advanced Composition 10.2 (1990): 231-248.

Bleich, David. "Genders of Writing." Journal of Advanced Composition 9 (1990): 10-25.

--------. "Sexism in Academic Styles of Learning." Journal of Advanced Composition 10.2 (1990): 231-248.

Belenky, Mary, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule. Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1986.

Chodorow, Nancy. The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkeley: University of California, 1978.

Emig, Janet. The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1971.

--------. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." College Composition and Communication 28.2 (1977): 122-128.

--------. "The Tacit Tradition: The Inevitability of a Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Writing Research." Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition. Ed. Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle. Conway, AR: L&S Books, 1980.

--------. The Web of Meaning. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1983.

Eagleton, Mary. Feminist Literary Theory. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Flynn, Elizabeth A. "Composing as a Woman." College Composition and Communication 39.4 (1988): 423-435.

--------. "Composing 'Composing as a Woman': A Perspective on Research." College Composition and Communication 41.1 (1990): 83-89.

Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Woman's Development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982.

Lauer, Janice, Gene Montague, Andrea Lunsford, and Janet Emig. Four Worlds of Writing. 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

Lerner, Gerda. The Creation of Patriarchy. New York: Oxford, 1987.

Lunsford, Andrea, and Lisa Ede. "Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration." MLA Convention, 1988.

--------. Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing. Carbondale: S. Illinois UP, 1990.

Shaughnessy, Mina. "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing." College Composition and Communication 27.3 (1976): 234-39.

--------. "Some Needed Research on Writing." College Composition and Communication 28.4 (1977): 317-320.

--------. "Selected Speeches and Essays of Mina Pendo Shaughnessy." Journal of Basic Writing 3.1 (1980): 91-119.

Vitanza, Victor, ed. "Historiography and the Histories of Rhetorics I: Revisionary Histories." Pretext: A Journal of Rhetorical Theory 8.1-2 (1987): 5-152.